SHRI DIPANKAR MUKHERJEE: Sir, I just said that yesterday, in your presence one of the Ministers had denied any rise in cement prices. But the NDA partner is saying that there is a 50 per cent rise in the prices of cement. That point could have been clarified by the Leader of the House because he was present in the House yesterday. So, what message is it sending to the House? (*Interruptions*) The Government is a whole entity. Yesterday, in spite of repeated questions from this side, it was denied that there has been any increase in cement prices.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It is not the question of the Leader of the House. That question has already been replied. (*Interruptions*) Now, Q.No. 206.

SHRI VAYALAR RAVI: Sir, cement prices have gone up by Rs. 50 in Kerala.

Inclusion of Majuli Island as National Heritage site

*206. DR. ARUN KUMAR SARMA: Will the Minister of TOURISM AND CULTURE be pleased to state the implementation status of the proposal to include Majuli Island of Assam for funding under NCF and Oil Foundation as a National Heritage site by amendment of existing norms for considering cases under cultural landscape category in addition to monuments as recommended by Government of Assam?

THE MINISTER FOR TOURISM AND CULTURE (SHRI JAGMOHAN): A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

Majuli Island has been identified by the Government of India as one of the suggested projects to be funded by Indian Oil Foundation through the National Culture Fund. Government has also decided that Majuli Island will be included in the cultural landscape category when it is nominated for inscription in the World Heritage List.

DR. ARUN KUMAR SARMA: Sir, the Majuli Island, in the mid-stream of river Brahmaputra in Assam, is not only the largest fresh water river island of the world, but it is also a famous cultural and

spiritual hub centre. More than 25 numbers of *Vaishnava* Monastries called *Satras* are functioning as the *Gurukul* style of institution for more than 400 years in its original form. Before our country could realise the importance...

MR. CHAIRMAN: What is your question. Please put your question.

DR. ARUN KUMAR SARMA: Sir, I am coming to the question. before our country could realise the importance of this cultural treasure of Majuli, the UNESCO has come forward to enlist it as a world heritage site for which the Ministry of Culture has to send the nomination dossier within a month to the UNESCO. I want to know from the hon. Minister as to what precisely his Ministry proposes to do to protect, preserve and promote the cultural heritage of Majuli Island as part of our national initiative.

SHRI JAGMOHAN: Sir, we have already carried out a comprehensive survey of this area. We have prepared a report, which we are submitting to the UNESCO for listing it as a world cultural site. Previously, only monuments were being listed. This time, we have recommended that in view of the fact that this is one of the largest river islands in the world, it should be listed. It has got all these *satras*, which my distinguished friend has mentioned. We have alreday, in the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, sanctioned Rs. 3.82 crores for the infrastructure development of this area. The money has been released.

Secondly, we are going to submit this list to the UNESCO. Thirdly, we have seen all the *satras,* assessed their work and selected eight out of 23 for giving Central protection. As soon as the Central protection is given, we will incur all the expenditure on the maintenance of those *satras*. These are the three major steps which we have taken in this area.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon, Member, I think, you are satisfied now.

DR. ARUN KUMAR SARMA: Sir, there is one more issue. Because, this institution is the only surviving Hindu Monastery of Vaishnavism, sustaining for more than four hundred years. These *satras* are not treated on par with other monastic institutions, in regard

to the release of grant for sustenance, as an institution of spiritualism and culture. I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether he would consider this Vaishnava Monastery equal footing in respect of grants from his Ministry.

SHRI JAGMOHAN: Sir, there are various cultural assets and each one is being helped. We are not saying one should be helped more and the other should be helped less. We are doing it on the merit and I assure the hon. Member that we have already given Rs. 4 crores. Let that money be spent and we will give more. We will ensure that there is no shortage of funds for this island. We will also ensure that all aspects of its culture, monasteries, as well as Hindu temples are protected, preserved and their heritage is kept intact. (*Interruption*)

DR. MANMOHAN SINGH: Mr, Chairman, Sir development of Majouli Island as a national heritage site is of great national interest. I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether he would consider the establishment of a high -powered advisory group of experts to plan the development of Majouli Island in an integrated manner to preserve the great cultural heritage.

SHRI JAGMOHAN: We have already constituted this group and this group is preparing a report for submission to the UNESCO.

Retail outlets of ONGC

*207. SHRI RAMA MUNI REDDY SIRIGIREDDY: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether ONGC has been granted permission to set up about 500 retail outlets in the country;

(b) if so, the break up of the outlets proposed to be set up in various States of the country, State-wise; and

(c) by when, these are going to become operational?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI RAM NAIK): (a) to (c) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.